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ABSTRACT

In recent years, adult education for Native Americans has reflected broader goals and has been concerned with playing a role in preserving native language and culture rather than encouraging assimilation. These four trends appear in the literature related to adult education for Native Americans: how adult education theories and methods such as transformative learning, use of narrative, and self-directed learning apply; identifying and acknowledging learning styles of Native American adults; approaches to conducting research with Native Americans in their communities; and identifying strategies for helping Native American adults achieve success in postsecondary and higher education. The diffuse nature of the literature on adult education for Native Americans is a serious issue. The literature base lacks depth; no strands of research and theory building can be detected; the literature does not seem to build on itself; and the topics of race and culture with regard to Native Americans have received insufficient attention. (Contains 21 resources that reflect the diffuse nature of the literature on adult education for Native Americans.) (YLB)

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERT NO. 28

Adult Education for Native Americans

by Susan Imel
2001

Historically, most adult education for Native Americans was tied to the goal of assimilation and was aimed toward individual economic improvement. In the 1950s, for example, programs designed to improve adult English literacy and provide adult vocational training were introduced (Szasz 1999). In recent years, adult education for Native Americans has reflected broader goals and has been concerned with playing a role in preserving native language and culture rather than encouraging assimilation (e.g., Lockard 1999; Schultz and Kroeger 1996; Still Smoking 1999).

Several trends appear in the literature related to adult education for Native Americans. How adult education theories and methods such as transformative learning, the use of narrative, and self-directed learning apply in Native American adult education is one trend (Atleo and James 2000; Beck 2000; Garrett 1996; Luna and Cullen 1997). Another trend relates to identifying and acknowledging learning styles of Native American adults (Aragon 1998; Guerrero 1999). Approaches to conducting research with Native Americans in their communities is a third trend (Castleden and Kurszewski 2000; Day, Blue, and Raymond 1998). A fourth trend is identifying strategies for helping Native American adults achieve success in postsecondary and higher education (Aragon 2000; Guerrero 1999; St. Pierre 1998; Yurkovich 2001).

The diffuse nature of the literature on adult education for Native Americans is a serious issue. It is true that a number of sources are available, but the literature base itself lacks depth. No strands of research and theory building can be detected: the literature does not seem to build on itself. The topics of race and culture have received attention in the literature of adult education during the past decade. It appears, however, that Native Americans have not yet received the attention that other groups, such as African Americans, have. Before the field of adult education can serve Native Americans adequately, this deficiency must be addressed.

Resources

Aragon, S. R. "A Conceptual Framework of Learning for Native American Adult Learners." In *Academy of Human Resource Development Conference Proceedings, Oak Brook, Illinois, March 4-8, 1998*, edited by R. J. Torraco. (ED 428 252)
A framework for designing, developing, and implementing formal educational experiences for Native American adult learners is proposed. The framework is based on an assessment of Native American adult learning styles from community college and university settings representing tribes from across the United States and Canada.

Aragon, S. R., ed. *Beyond Access: Methods and Models for Increasing Retention and Learning Among Minority Students. New Directions for Community Colleges* no. 112. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Winter 2000. (ED 449 837)
Alternative models, approaches, and perspectives to consider in working with ethnic minority students are offered in this volume. Among issues addressed are assessment, career and educational goals, learning enhancement, success courses, mentoring programs, educational technology, and the integration of nonminority instructors into the minority environment.

Atleo, M. R., and James, A. "Oral Tradition—A Literacy for Lifelong Learning: Native American Approaches to Justice and Wellness Education." In *AERC 2000: An International Conference. Proceedings of the 41st Annual Adult Education Research Conference, British Columbia, June 2-4, 2000*, edited by T. J. Sork, V-L. Chapman, and R. St. Clair, pp. 535-536. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2000. www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2000/atleom&jamesa-web.htm
Native American oral tradition provides a literacy for lifelong learning that promotes perspective transformation. This approach is particularly suited to justice and wellness education because participants engage multiple ways of being and knowing. Oral traditions can be understood in the context of transformative learning that has implications for adult education.

Beck, D. R. M. "Native American Education in Chicago: Teach Them Truth." *Education and Urban Society* 32, no. 2 (February 2000): 237-255.
Following an overview of the historical development of the Chicago Native American community, the origins of the Native American Educational Services (NAES) College in Chicago are described. Discusses how adult education with its focus on transformation and consciousness raising has had an impact on the way education is viewed at NAES College.

Castleden, H., and Kurszewski, D. "Re/searchers as Co-learners: Life Narratives on Collaborative Re/search in Aboriginal Communities." In *AERC 2000: An International Conference. Proceedings of the 41st Annual Adult Education Research Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia, June 2-4, 2000*, edited by T. J. Sork, V-L. Chapman, and R. St. Clair, pp. 71-45. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2000. www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2000/castledenhk1-web.htm
Ethical and cultural issues related to adult educators conducting research in Aboriginal communities are explored based on the authors' experiences. Researchers need to be viewed as co-learners rather than as experts.

Day, P. A.; Blue, E. T.; and Raymond, M. P. "Conducting Research with an Urban American Indian Community: A Collaborative Approach." *Journal of American Indian Education* 37, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 21-33.
The effects of needs assessment or larger system change efforts on Native American communities have not been well documented. This article outlines a research project undertaken in one urban Native American community, documenting specific community-based strategies employed by a research team composed primarily of Native Americans conducting a needs assessment.

Elliott, G. A., and Iron Cloud Miller, A. "The United States Supreme Court vs. American Indian Self-Determination: A Case Study of Resistance and Social Action." In *37th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings, Tampa, Florida, May 16-19, 1996*, compiled by H. Reno, and M. Witte. (ED 419 087)
Adults engaged in active resistance can effect a recharacterization of recorded histories that define social and political relationships across generations. The relationship between social action and recharacterization of the events in the historical context of the Native American struggle for self-determination is examined.

Garrett, M. T. "'Two People': An American Indian Narrative of Bicultural Identity." *Journal of American Indian Education* 36, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 1-21.
The bicultural Identity Development Model is described and illustrated in relation to the narrative of a Native American elder. The narrative or life-story elaborates upon the informal educational influences of a traditional Native American approach to "learning the Medicine."

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Guerrero, R. N. "The Strategies of Successful American Indian and Native Learners in the Adult Higher Education Environment." In *40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings, DeKalb, Illinois, May 21-23, 1999*, compiled by A. Rose. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. (ED 431 901)
This study explored and examined the learning techniques used by Native American learners in higher education and the factors that they believed contributed to their success as Native learners. Mentoring relationships, Native American-based support systems, determination to give back to the community, and spirituality were strategies employed by successful Native learners.

Haig-Brown, C. *Taking Control: Power and Contradiction in First Nations Adult Education*. Vancouver: UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 1995. (ED 391 627)
This book presents the results of an ethnographic study of the Native Education Centre (NEC), an urban adult education center, in Vancouver, British Columbia. It focuses on the people at the NEC—First Nations students, board members, and teachers—and reveals their beliefs about First Nations' control of education and how they put those beliefs into practice.

Lockard, L. "Navajo Language and Culture in Adult Education." In *Providing Culturally Relevant Adult Education: A Challenge for the Twenty-First Century, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 82, edited by T. Guy, pp. 67-78. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.
The importance of language and culture in providing culturally relevant instruction for Native American adults is stressed. Examples of adult education programs serving Navajo adults are discussed.

Luna, G., and Cullen, D. "Mentoring as Self-Directed Learning for Native Americans." In *Expanding Horizons in Self-Directed Learning*, by H. B. Long and Associates. Norman, OK: Classic Book Distributors, 1997.
Native American students were paired with Native American university professionals, and students worked on self-directed activities related to their mentoring goals. The investigation of the self-directed learning activities revealed that students would continue them.

O'Meara, S., and West, D. A., eds. *From Our Eyes: Learning from Indigenous Peoples*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996.
One purpose of this edited collection of papers is to expose academic communities to indigenous learning and indigenous knowledge. Collectively, the papers illustrate the related problems of authenticity and authority and suggest that the best way to understand indigenous knowledge is through the eyes of indigenous peoples.

Orr, J. A. "Learning from Native Adult Education." In *Addressing the Spiritual Dimensions of Adult Learning: What Adult Educators Can Do, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 85, edited by L. M. English and M. A. Gillen, pp. 59-66. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
Adult educators can learn from Native peoples' focus on the four directions of the medicine wheel: the emotional, physical, spiritual, and cognitive. Examples from Native American adult education programs are used to illustrate the chapter.

Richardson, C., and Blanchet-Cohen, N. *Adult Education and Indigenous Peoples in Canada*. Hamburg, Germany: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2000. www.unesco.org/education/uie/pdf/Canada.pdf
Indigenous people participated actively at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg in 1997 and, as a result, the UNESCO Institute for Education initiated an international survey on adult education and indigenous peoples. The Canadian portion of the survey is reported in this paper. A number of interviews were carried out with experts in the field in an effort to capture some of the knowledge, lessons learned, and observations of those in the field who lack time to write about their experiences.

Sanchez, J.; Stuckey, M. E.; and Morris, R. "Distance Learning in Indian Country: Becoming the Spider on the Web." *Journal of American Indian Education* 37, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 1-17.
The potential uses of distance learning for maintaining and sustaining Native American tribal communities within the United States are explored. Included are a discussion of traditional education in tribal contexts and its relationship to tribal uses of distance education technology and an analysis of the potential outcomes and consequences of these practices.

Schultz, M., and Kroeger, M. *Teaching and Learning with Native Americans: A Handbook for Non-Native American Adult Education*. Phoenix,: Arizona Adult Literacy and Technology Resource Center, 1996. www.literacynet.org/lp/namericans
This practical handbook covers a number of areas including culturally relevant curriculum, strategies for teaching Native Americans, contrasting values, cultural concepts and lessons, and cultural awareness. Examples and lesson suggestions are included throughout.

St. Pierre, N. "Listening to the Student Voice in Adult Education." In *39th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings, San Antonio, Texas, May 15-16, 1998*, compiled by J. C. Kimmel. San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word, 1998. (ED 426 247) www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1998/98stpierre.htm
How Little Big Horn College (LBHC) is meeting the needs of its students in providing tribal college education is documented in this paper that presents student perceptions. LBHC has been successful in meeting the needs of its adult population and, in many respects, the adult learners at LBHC are like other adult learners who attend tribal and mainstream colleges.

Still Smoking, D. M. "The Role of Language in the Preservation of a Culture." In *40th Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings, DeKalb, Illinois, May 21-23, 1999*, compiled by A. Rose. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. (ED 431 901) www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1999/99still.htm
A study described the perceptions of selected Blackfeet elders concerning what constitutes the traditional Blackfeet knowledge base and how they believe it should be transmitted through formal and informal institutions in the Blackfeet community. Results revealed the belief that formal education has failed to include Blackfeet learning and teachings. Elders expressed an urgency for the Blackfeet language to be used more often in transmitting knowledge.

Szasz, M. C. *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928. 3rd ed.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.
Adult education is covered in this study of federal Indian education. Included in the third edition is an analysis and interpretation of trends that have shaped Native American education in the 1980s and 1990s.

Yurkovich, E. E. "Working with American Indians toward Educational Success." *Journal of Nursing Education* 40, no. 6 (September 2001): 259-269.
Reports on a study to identify factors that supported educational success of American Indian baccalaureate nursing graduates. Four interactive core variables emerged: individual American Indian student, instructor, institutions, and external variables.

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